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ART AND PROGRESS

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"THE HAWTHORNE BUSH. WITH SEATS BENEATH THE SHADE"

FROM "THE DESERTED VILLAGE." AN ILLUSTRATION BY EDWIN A. ABBEY. COPYRIGHT 1902 BY HARPER & BROTHERS. BY PERMISSION OF HARPER & BROTHERS

ABBEY'S ART

BY WILLIAM HOWE DOWNES

SINCE Edwin A. Abbey's death there has been a tendency in some quarters to give him a place among the greatest of mural painters, and to resent any sort of criticism of his decorative work, more especially that criticism which classifies him rather as an illustrator than a decorative painter. The intimation that his mural work in the Boston Public Library, the most popular wall painting in America, is in any degree wanting in decorative character, or is in any respect allied to illustration, would be passionately denied by his over-zealous admirers, who, for some reason which is difficult to understand, seem to think there is some stigma

attached to the illustrator. Nevertheless, Abbey was essentially an illustrator all his life, and a remarkably fine one, more imaginative and scholarly than the average illustrator, and equipped with a rather uncommonly strong draftsmanship. His art was none the worse for being literary and humanistic, quite the contrary. He possessed the enviable talent of being interesting.

His illustrations to Shakespeare's comedies are singularly uneven. His conceptions of the characters are more marked by refinement, tenderness, grace, delicacy, than by dramatic force or grandeur. His drawings of the female char-

acters in "As You Like It," "Measure for Measure," etc., are therefore among his best things. His *Rosalind*, *Isabella*, *Beatrice*, *Silvia*, *Perdita*, and the rest of the heroines of the comedies, are real entities, living creations, and lovable women. They have a shade more refinement, truth to tell, than the somewhat candid and outspoken originals, who have their share of the Elizabethan naïveté and freedom of speech, but on the whole it is only fair to say that Abbey had an extraordinary faculty of entering into the spirit of that sixteenth century life in England about which the immortal dramatist's fancy wove its beautiful fabric of comedy. And it is in these drawings that we perceive one of the artist's traits to be his sense of humor. It is, of all his traits, that which serves him best in portraying Shakespeare's people. He has pathos, too, no doubt, but what he depicts with the most gusto is the pure fun in the characters and the situations. Merriment and animal spirits bubble out from the eyes and mouths of his people as spontaneously as water from a hillside spring; it is no grinning make-believe, but actual fun, which explodes in laughter, and is not always over-nice.

These drawings, mostly done in pen and ink, represent the highest plane of the illustrator's art, being unique in imaginative power, inventiveness, humor, tenderness, and refinement. It is certainly fitting that such qualities should be employed in the illustration of no less perfect literary works than the comedies of Shakespeare. No one has ever illustrated these comedies so well, I think, and surely no one has ever brought to the task so much sympathy and intelligence. If Abbey had contributed to the sum of art in the world nothing besides his lithe, graceful and demure heroines, now bold and merry like *Beatrice*, now downcast and sweetly sober like *Rosalind*, his work would still be of great interest and consequence and charm.

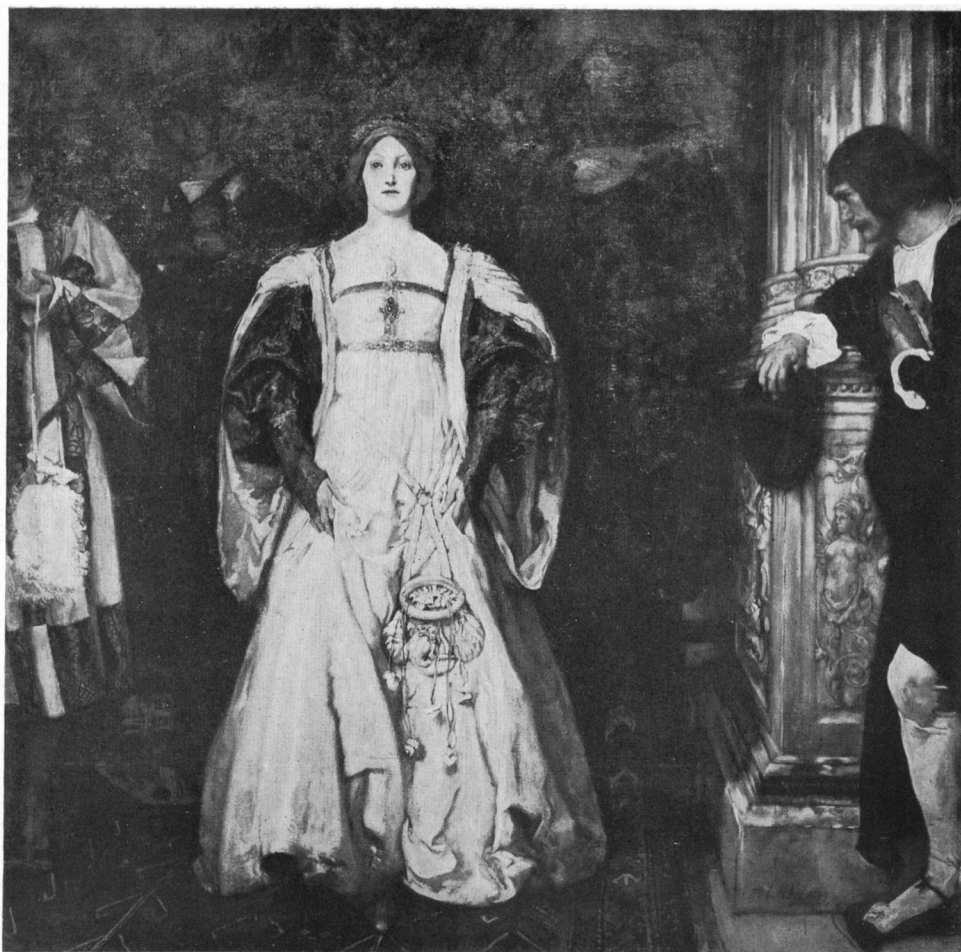
When he essayed to illustrate "The Tempest," I think he found, if I may be pardoned for so expressing it, that he was up against it. The fact is, "The Tempest" is a work of art so subtle, remote, unique,

it is almost unillustratable. Many artists have tried it, and they have all failed. The drawing of the second scene in the first act, in which Ferdinand is mystified by the fairy music of the island, is incoherent. The shipwreck picture is not so bad, allowing for the unreal character of persons and events in the poem, and there is plenty of spirit in the "Trinculo and Caliban." In the drawing entitled "Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo (*Ariel* invisible)," *Ariel* is unhappily not invisible, but is scratched in with a fine point in a pose suggestive of a drunken fish-wife. "The Banquet" (third scene of the third act) is weirdly theatrical, yet it does not particularly strike the imagination. The "Tempest" series of drawings are among the few in all the Abbey illustrations of Shakespeare's comedies which suggest the stage and its devices.

It can hardly escape the notice of those who are familiar with Abbey's illustrations that they are the work of a pictorial artist who habitually thinks in line rather than in color. The charm of his best drawings—and they have much of this elusive element—depends in large degree upon their linear beauty. This is to be observed in his drawing of *Rosalind*, *Celia* and *Touchstone*, in the fourth scene of the second act of "As You Like It," where the trio are sitting on a trunk of a fallen tree:—

"Ay, now am I in Arden; the more fool I; when I was at home I was in a better place; but travelers must be content."

Nevertheless, when Abbey turned to painting, he showed that he was capable of much more than a draftsman's masterly employment of line. His easel paintings added to the sterling qualities of his work in black and white many other desirable pictorial qualities, not least among them a felicitous and harmonious sense of color which could scarcely have been fairly predicated upon the basis of his former achievements. I have in mind his picture of the "Strolling Players," a work of a high order of human interest, a dramatic and touching page from the book of life. The principal figure in this composition, the woman who stands in front of a rustic English tavern, singing, to the accompani-



SYLVIA

OWNED BY HON. W. A. CLARK

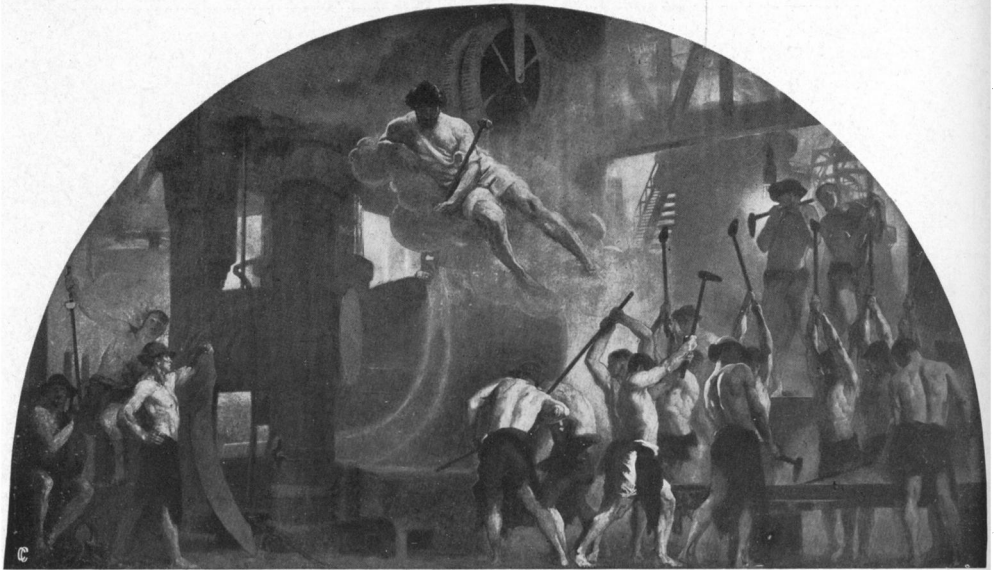
EDWIN A. ABBEY

ment of a harpist, is a type not easily forgotten. His "May-day Morning," again, is a page of exhilarating, youthful joy and hopefulness. The scene is a pretty, old-fashioned English garden, enclosed by high walls, and laid out in quaint style, with gravel walks bordered by box, and beds of flowers on either hand, and with small pear and peach trees in blossom. Above the mossy old wall the sky is just faintly flushed with the rosy light of the morning. In the garden there are two figures, a handsome youth dressed in buff, whose hat is garlanded with flowers, leading by the hand his coy but not unwilling Corinna—

"Come, my Corinna, come, and coming,
mark

How each street turns a lane, each lane
a park."

This buxom maid is of the wholesome and substantial order, and her pretty head is elegantly set upon a robust neck. Her light summer gown, caught up over the hips on either side, showing a striped petticoat beneath, like a Roman scarf in pattern, her ample bodice, with its bands of broad black trimmings, short sleeves, and flower-garnished hat, combine to form a most becoming costume. The figures are beautifully drawn, buoyant



THE SPIRIT OF VULCAN

EDWIN A. ABBEY

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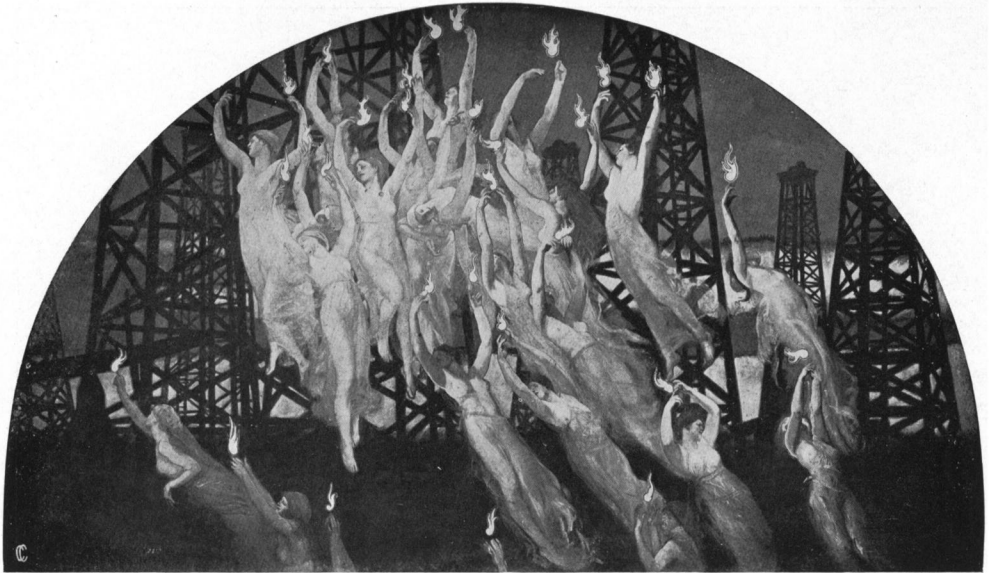
and graceful in movement, and the expression of character in both is extremely fine.

"Fiammetta's Song," an interesting motive from the Decameron, depicts a group of noble dames on a marble-paved belvedere or terrace, crowning an Italian hill, sheltered by great stone pines, and commanding a wide prospect of distant hills and valleys. At the left stands Fiammetta in a grand pose, her head thrown back, her lute held in her hands, and her rich crimson dress, with flowing sleeves, making a superb accent of warm color. The other ladies are seated at their ease here and there, listening with dreamy and rapt faces. Among them are some beauties of rare distinction and elegance.

It is no derogation to say of these easel paintings that their chief merits relate to the illustration of life and character. Nor is it so to say that his mural paintings, taken as a whole, must be placed in the same category. They are dramatic narrative in form and color, full of romantic spirit, and intensely interesting. This sufficiently accounts for the enormous popularity of the frieze of the "Quest of the Holy Grail" in Boston. The legend is a

rich and fitting motive for a wall painting. It is full of potential pictures itself, and lends itself with singular aptitude to the romantic bent of the artist's temperament. True it is that one must read much to know the whole story of Galahad, the knights of King Arthur's round table, the Loathly Damsel, Blancheffleur, Amfortas, the Golden Tree, and the Seven Sins, but the literature of the subject is easily available to all, and is familiar to many. In a day when everybody reads, allusions of a literary nature cannot be seriously objected to upon the old ground that paintings should tell their own story. To exclude from the realm of mural decoration all the subjects that are not completely self-explanatory would be to banish more than half of the best modern work.

In his more recent mural decorations, painted for the State Capitol of Pennsylvania, his native State, Abbey departed from the legendary and symbolical vein of the Boston frieze to take up both historical and allegorical compositions on a very large scale. The principal painting of this new series, which is destined for the wall of the House of Representatives, is the "Apotheosis of Pennsylvania," which is thus described: Two gray col-



THE SPIRIT OF LIGHT

EDWIN A. ABBEY

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umns with gilded capitals carry the spectator's eyes toward the sumptuous temple where the Genius of State is enthroned behind laurel under the majestic dome of blue and white sky. Around the temple are grouped the worthies who have helped to shape the destinies of the commonwealth and to crown it with honor. Here are Sir Walter Raleigh, Hudson, Peter Minnit, Anthony Wayne, John Dickinson, Thomas MacKean, Bishop White, Muhlenberg, Dallas, Caspar Wistar, John Fitch, Oliver Evans, David Rittenhouse, Benjamin Rush, Stephen Girard, Tom Paine, William Penn, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Morris, Generals Meade and Hancock, Thaddeus Stevens, Governor Curtin, and other distinguished Pennsylvanians. We are told that one of Mr. Abbey's most authoritative associates in the Royal Academy says that no other painter in England could have approached this work in mastery of decorative art.

To left and right of the central panel above described are to be panels illustrating "Penn's Treaty with the Indians" and "The Signing of the Declaration." A circular ceiling painting depicts "The Flight of the Hours." This is twenty-four feet in diameter. It is designed in

the style of a medieval chart, toned from light to dark blue, of the zone of starry heavens, within which lie the paths of sun, moon and planets. The constellations and signs of the Zodiac are studded with golden stars. The sun rules the ranges of the day; a silvery crescent moon is a pale memory of it in the darker circuits of azure; a wandering comet flashes its brilliant fires; and there is a stream of radiance from the Milky Way. Circling around this field of blue and gold are the four-and-twenty Hours in joyous or somber flight. These are beautiful maidens, tripping gracefully where the light is brightest, and revealing roseate flesh tints through gauzy draperies of pale blue, or shivering in black robes with averted faces where the shadows of night are deepening.

The other mural paintings for the Pennsylvania Capitol consist of a series of four lunettes and four circular panels. The subjects of the lunettes are respectively "The Spirit of Vulcan," "The Spirit of Light," "The Spirit of Religion," and "Science Revealing the Treasures of the Earth." In "The Spirit of Vulcan" we see nearly a score of seminude workmen toiling in steel works, the



THE OATH

EDWIN A. ABBEY

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aerial figure of the god of metals presiding over their work. In "The Spirit of Light" a swarm of soaring female figures in transparent draperies, with uplifted arms and hands tipped with flames, rises through the air, against a background of oil wells. In "Science Revealing the Treasures of the Earth" a group of nude miners delves in the earth at the opening of a pit in the foreground, while the aerial figures of Science, Plenty and Fortune hover over them. In "The Spirit of Re-

ligion" a fleet of great ships under full sail bears down upon us, led by three flying figures symbolizing Hope, Faith and Love.

The four circular panels have for their topics Art, Science, Justice and Religion. In each of these panels a single figure stands in the center of the space, armed with the appropriate attributes, and surrounded by an inscription in Roman capitals which forms a part of the decorative scheme.

THE GRAPHIC ARTISTS OF THE XIXTH CENTURY

BY A. E. GALLATIN

AN exhibition intended to illustrate the more important tendencies of English and French art during the past hundred years was shown in London last

June and July under the auspices of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Gravers.

It would not only be an ungrateful,